April 12, 2005: Everett Address to Missile Defense Conference

CONGRESSMAN TERRY EVERETTChairman of House Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces Address To MISSILE DEFENSE CONFERENCERonald Reagan Trade Center
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Good morning.

It is an honor to have been invited to address this distinguished group and I look forward to a thoughtful discussion on missile defense.

Need for a Strong National Missile Defense System

For the better part of 20 years the United States has sought a way to protect our population from a ballistic missile attack, and I believe that time has never been more critical for the development and implementation of such a missile defense system than today.

The threats posed by the proliferation of ballistic missiles from North Korea, in addition to the potential nuclear weapons program in Iran, serve to illustrate how dangerous and uncertain our world is.

The nature of the threat is not limited to state-sponsored programs from rogue regimes, but from increasingly smarter terrorists seeking to acquire missile technology. Recent news of Ukrainian missiles, supposedly bound for Russia that were diverted to terrorist groups before being halted, underscore this developing threat.

In the face of these gathering risks, it is imperative that the United States move forward to field "near-term" capabilities in missile defense technology. An immediate emphasis should be placed on moving forward with continued operational testing and deployment of our ground-based mid-course, THAAD, and Aegis missile defense systems.

Though the ground-based program has experienced several recent problems with testing, we also know that finding such problems is precisely the purpose of testing. Those of us familiar with the development of the submarine launched ballistic missile program of the late 1950's and early 1960's recall technical challenges that arose during the development of that unique capability.

Today, the TRIDENT submarine launched ballistic missile serves as the cornerstone of today's strategic deterrent force. Likewise, we must be patient and willing to accept some setbacks as we continue to move forward with rigorous operational testing of our Ground-based Midcourse Defense System. These are tough challenges for national defense, and they don't come easily.

In the area of terminal defense, our committee is encouraged by the aggressive flight schedule being pursued by the THAAD or Terminal High Altitude Air Defense Program, with a goal of sending the first operational unit to the field in 2009. It is critical to get those systems that offer a "near term" capability for the protection of our troops, such as THAAD, tested and out to the field as soon as possible.

With respect to boost phase defense, it is critical that we pursue viable options with a strategy that balances capabilities and costs. There is a significant advantage in taking out a ballistic missile prior to it deploying reentry vehicles, decoys or countermeasures, in order to increase the chances of a successful intercept. Furthermore, preventing the debris field resulting from a successful intercept from falling on friendly soil enhances our nations' safety.

In reviewing each of the layered defenses within the ballistic missile defense program, Congress must continually reassess program funding in terms of cost and performance. Even the strongest congressional proponents of missile defense, and I count myself in that category, are faced with the realities of a constrained budget.

The nation is best served by pursuing those research and development strategies that provide insight into both technical potential and demonstrated performance at each step of the way, known as "knowledge points." I am encouraged by the Missile Defense Agency's strategy of basing future support on demonstrated performance.

Capabilities-based Acquisition

The unique nature of the threats that challenge us emphasize the need to develop "first of a kind" capabilities. The Missile Defense Agency's (MDA) mandate to assume the role of research, development, testing, and evaluation to develop the "hit to kill" capability against a ballistic missile flying at thousands of miles per hour, is a most challenging task. Adding decoys and countermeasures further complicates this already tough physics and geometry problem. Therefore, from a technology perspective, it would be most efficient to develop our missile defense system in pieces,

perfecting each, rather than trying to tackle this all at once.

The "hit to kill" requirement, or "bullet to bullet" approach required for certain types of missile defenses, is still somewhat on the leading edge of technology. Certain design concepts and engineering capabilities are still in the development stage. The "physics problem" here, while certainly challenging, is also "very doable" with the right approach.

As General Obering has stated previously, we have proved that hit to kill can be done and we must continue to demonstrate this capability over and over. However, he and his team simply do not have the advantage of being able to leverage off of the experience of demonstrated technology from our legacy weapons systems with which we have a lot of experience-fighter aircraft, nuclear submarines, tanks, and even UAVs.

I applaud the Missile Defense Agency on the use of "knowledge points" to inform program managers of progress towards reaching key milestones. These include:

The Airborne Laser program's successful "first light" and flight test of a beam control/fire control system in late 2004,

Systems Integration Lab full power test later in 2005, and

A lethal demonstration scheduled for 2008.

I visited Edwards AFB in last July to personally look at the Airborne Laser (ABL) project. Seeing for the first time the complex optical coatings and chemical laser piping arrangements on the 747 aircraft, I walked away with a much greater appreciation for the enormous amount of work already accomplished. I also have a better appreciation of the complexity of the task ahead of us.

General Cartwright, Commander of STRATCOM, has specifically commented on the potential high payoff from an Airborne Laser capability if the lethal demonstration is successful. I agree. This program, with its knowledge points, is structured in such a way that we can evaluate its progress toward the 2008 demonstration.

I understand that while the Missile Defense Agency has designated ABL as the primary boost phase program, it is premature to rely on it as the only boost phase capability. In that light, MDA is smart in utilizing the KEI program as a backup for boost phase defense as well as possibly providing an upgrade to the midcourse interceptor.

The restructuring of the Kinetic Energy Interceptor program to focus on booster development, driving towards a "knowledge point" in 2008 is also a step forward. The extreme acceleration needed for a boost phase kinetic interceptor is the critical capability that must be met in order for a KEI interceptor to achieve its mission. Focusing on this booster development at the appropriate pace, while in parallel, we watch the progress of the Airborne Laser in the next few years makes the most sense.

In short, I believe the Missile Defense Agency's use of "knowledge points" coupled with rigorous performance assessment every step of the way is the correct approach for the way ahead.

Equally critical to accomplishing our goals is the implementation of rigorous and realistic testing which demonstrates the real capabilities of our missile defense system.

I am very encouraged with the robust test plan that MDA has developed for fiscal years 2005 through 2007. Specific examples of operational flight or intercept tests over this and the next two years are as follows:

GMD flight tests: three in FY 05, five in FY 06, and four in FY 07

Aegis Flight tests: three in FY 05, two in FY 06, and two in FY 07

THAAD flight tests: two in FY 05, four in FY 06, and four in FY 07

The results of these operationally realistic tests will help us determine if the current system needs improving before we proceed to upgrades.

Areas of Concern

While supportive of the direction in which MDA is heading, I believe it is appropriate to highlight to this audience a few areas of congressional concern.

To ensure that progress is made in fielding a capable and effective missile defense system, I believe it essential that the Missile Defense Agency and the Department of Defense continue to base program decision-making on the achievement of knowledge-points. The bottom line is that demonstrated performance (or lack thereof) should drive our priorities and

future spending. Frankly, this may require termination of a program if progress is not being made.

We must also look to a comparison of costs and capabilities -- a cost-benefit analysis approach to individual ballistic missile defense program elements is a must. For example:

ABL: While we don't expect a lethal demonstration of the Airborne Laser until sometime in 2008, we must also take a hard look at what it would take to operationally deploy an airborne laser system to provide a capability against a North Korean launched missile in the boost phase. This cost analysis must include research and development, procurement, operational and maintenance and infrastructure costs.

ABL vs. KEI: It is also important for Congress to understand the tradeoffs between the Airborne Laser and Kinetic Energy Interceptor programs. These trades involve not only costs and capabilities but also the feasibility of how we would actually deploy an operational system. Technology maturity, sound operational concepts and individual service plans for the future, to include future year funding profiles, all must be considered in this complex calculus.

Service Transitions: On top of the challenges of missile defense R&D, the eventual transition of Missile Defense Agency programs to the various services raises. As with all such transitions, the devil is in the details. The congressional defense committees are responsible for asking the hard questions. Will they retain proper funding and support once they leave the protective umbrella of the MDA and transition to the services where they will necessarily compete with other programs?

The Army is scheduled to field the first THAAD fire unit in 2009. Will it remain on schedule and how does the Army intend to pay for future THAAD unit procurement, especially with the looming FCS pressure?

The Navy's fielding of Aegis capability requires coordination with the Chief of Naval Operations' future shipbuilding plans. Are future ship designs and projected deployment strategies consistent with sea- based missile defenses? We're down to a 250 ship Navy - is this sufficient to handle both missile defense and traditional Naval operations?

Finally, we must look at how our missile defense capabilities mesh with the current and future geo-political situation. The political world remains in constant flux and weapons systems developed today may be restricted in their usefulness as hosting countries change leadership.

Among the questions we must ask ourselves are:

Where would we forward deploy an airborne laser aircraft?

Where would we position a land-based kinetic energy launcher?

How do international cooperative programs fit into our broader national strategy for missile defense?

A coherent strategy which balances proven technology, current and future threats, military service spending pressures, and the dynamic geopolitical landscape is essential to fielding a successful missile defense system.

However, as a nation, we've spent upwards of $80 billion for a national missile defense system. Due to the hard work of many of you in this room, we are very close to making this a reality. Further Congressional support for missile defense development hinges on realistic testing and positive results. Action to the contrary places the program in jeopardy and the country at risk.